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OVERWORK, IDLENESS OR INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION?¹

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The great difference between the child labor of other times and civilizations and our own consists in the fact that in more primitive forms of industry the work of children constituted a large part of their education. Since labor was principally done by hand and with the simplest tools, the steps into artisanship were well adapted to child development. In early New England life—to go no further afield—both boys and girls were occupied in a hundred activities whose very variety had an undoubted effect in developing resourcefulness, endurance, alertness, skill and other high qualities of mind and heart. Even if their work was hard, it was also helpful; even if the hours were long, the processes were not so monotonous and irksome as to ruin the child for future usefulness.

To-day, however, labor has been specialized and subdivided into innumerable and infinitesimal operations. Power machines are driving out the handicrafts, and domestic industry has been supplanted by shop and factory methods. Industries are so housed and segregated that it is possible neither to see nor to partake in a large part of modern industries except as a wage-worker, and then only to learn one infinitesimal process. Even the apprentice system is dead or fast dying. Journeymen no longer have apprentices, but only “helpers,” whom they teach as little as possible.

The contrast between child labor in earlier days and in modern city conditions perhaps appears most deplorable when attention is directed to what are euphemistically called the “home industries.” So completely has the home lost its good name as a center of industry that the only remedy for the sweat shop is now considered by experts to be the prohibition of profit-making home industries and the conse-

¹ This article was contributed to the ANNALS, and although not a part of the program of the Annual Meeting of the National Child Labor Committee, is included in this volume because of its pertinancy to the topics discussed.

quent increasing relegation of industries to factories where they can be brought under regulation. Truly a noteworthy change from the time when children got a large part and a good part of their education in domestic industries to the time when domestic industries must be abolished in order to save the children from exploitation in them!

The only relief from the intolerable conditions of modern child labor is found by the ordinary child in migration to some other employment just as bad. This instability is commonly deplored because of the evident evil of thus producing an army of shiftless, irresponsible ne'er-do-wells with no lasting associations, but the fact further illustrates the failure of our modern methods of child labor to educate the child. He changes from one form of employment to another, but is educated in none.

In any age previous to the introduction of power machinery, a new employment for children always meant new opportunities for education. Doing something new meant learning something new. But although we have provided by the help of machinery hundreds of new employments for children, we do not thereby give them new sources of education and larger opportunities for development. On the contrary, these new occupations put at stake child-life and sap the foundations of future prosperity.

At the very time when man's power is multiplied a thousand times, when he has at his disposal fingers of steel infinitely more nimble than his own, when he can lift inconceivable weights and strike irresistible blows, and when he can reach around the globe, he does all these things at the expense of his own manhood, womanhood, and, worst of all, childhood. Modern invention is like Frankenstein's creation, which, dehumanized by abuse, became a curse to the inventor. It is bad enough to sacrifice adult life, but to lay the future life and power of the race, in the form of the children, on this altar of mechanical improvement means not progress, but the surest retrogression. "Where there is only a cupidinous ravishment of the future, there, we think, is no true society."

In a word, whereas once the labor of the child was advantageous to him as a means of growth, physical, mental and moral, the effect of modern child labor is degrading, dehumanizing, stupefying and demoralizing.

Bad as child labor is, there is another phase to this problem of the modern city child which, though not so commonly recognized because not so startling nor so dramatic, is none the less serious. It is that presented by the idleness of city children. It is commonly assumed that the children who are not at work are taken care of by the schools, and it is this assumption which leads to the stress laid upon compulsory education by the opponents of child labor.

What proportion of children are in school, what proportion at work and what proportion idle it is not possible to prove statistically because adequate enumerations have not been made. But that children are occupied in school far less than is ordinarily supposed is evident from a computation which takes account of the number of school days in a year, the number of absences, the waking hours of the child and the number of school hours per day. From these it appears that on an average the school keeps children busy about one-third of the time when they are awake.

Now the question arises: What are the children of the city doing during their out-of-school hours? On the one hand some are engaged in exhausting physical labor, in factories, sweat shops and especially in the delivery of goods. Many are news and errand boys. For them the school session is a comparatively restful time between hours of work that are both stultifying and demoralizing. Pitiable as their lot is, it is hardly less so than that of the far greater number of school children in the city who have no required work to do. We cannot deceive ourselves into the belief that since they are not being overworked either in school or in shop they are therefore happily at play² or at rest at home.

A visit to the poorer part of any of our large cities will disprove this assumption. As the result of the prevalent conditions of home life in the tenement, the child is inevitably forced out into the street, not only during the day time, but, as common observation shows, until late at night, not only in good weather but in foul. The child has nothing to do at home unless, perhaps, his "home" be a sweat shop where he works; otherwise he is only in the way there. In the evening he cannot go to sleep even if he stays there on account of the work and talk, and so he often runs in the street

² The cultural effects of play and the importance of providing ample opportunities for it are well recognized and do not need emphasis here. The neglected issue is the educational importance of work.

until ten, eleven or twelve o'clock. As a result it is no exaggeration to say that the tenement child grows up on the street, where he is "educated with fatal precision." What street life makes of the boy and girl is known to all who are familiar with the actual conditions or with the literature of the subject.

But it is not tenement children alone who are exposed to the evils of idleness. It has been estimated by Robert Hunter that there are one-half a million children in greater New York whose only playground is the street. As a matter of fact most of the children in the borough of Manhattan play on the streets, and the street, I submit, is not the place where healthful, stimulating games can be played. As a result the children are largely idle. Even in the better parts of the city one constantly sees groups of well-dressed children listlessly standing about "waiting for something to turn up." Play on an asphalt pavement between two rows of brownstone fronts soon gets to be monotonous. The parks are far away and often protected with warning signs to "Keep off the grass." At home there is little to do in the few small rooms except to read books, just what is done at school. To tease and annoy others, to make uncanny noises, to smoke, to gamble, to dissipate energy in trifling ways, to use and scribble foul language and symbols and to be always ready to "cheese it, the cop," are the open doors before most city boys. With things as they are, between the school and the factory and the street and the pigeon hole flat and the policeman's club, it is little wonder that many a boy finds mischief to do, nuisances to commit and crimes to perpetrate until he is shut up in the reformatory, where some rational account of his nature may be taken and he is given something useful to do.

The case is not so bad for the girls, for there is more for them to do; there is still a remnant of domestic industry left in the apartment home in which they can take part. But still there is plenty of idle out-of-school time left for them, when their far-fetched devices of games are exhausted and they sit gazing and gossiping and "showing off." There is good evidence that the ranks of prostitutes are largely recruited from those who are untrained in any sort of manual labor. The dilemma for the city child seems to be either painful exhaustion and demoralizing work on the one hand, or futile idleness and its consequent immorality on the other.

Even when parents realize the dangers and would gladly set their children at some worthy and educative employment they find that it costs more to do so than to keep them in idleness. The problem has become too large for the individual parent to handle. What was once an individual or domestic problem has become a social problem. Once the responsibility lay with the parent; now it lies with society. Serious as this problem seems when viewed in its social relations, it appears none the less so from the point of view of child nature. This is clear when we remember that the normal child is not averse to work; on the contrary he is bubbling over with energy which under normal conditions expends itself partly in play, partly in work. Children can work, under proper conditions children like to work. President G. Stanley Hall begs the whole question in his definition, "I think work is doing something you don't like to do because somebody else makes you do it." This is not work; this is drudgery. Of course children do not like drudgery. No more do adults. But there is no greater joy of childhood than manipulative and creative activity. This, beginning as play, a delight in the activity itself, shades insensibly into work, which has a determined end.³

Enforced idleness either on city streets or in prisons is a horrible fate for child or adult, and children, we may well believe, are not idle because they want to be idle. They are idle because they are deprived of work, except under such conditions as make it overwearisome, painful and demoralizing. Yet even so they submit to it, even embrace the opportunity to perform it. Enormous numbers of them quit school to take up work.

Where shall we lay the blame for this? The greed of employers in exploiting the unskilled labor of childish hands is a common object of reprobation, and justly so; the stupidity and shortsightedness of parents is open to the severest criticism for allowing their children to become laborers, but neither the greed of the employers

³ The truth is, that the common idea of work needs correction. So much of the world's work has been done under compulsion, either in chattel, serf or wage slavery, that the idea of work as the irrepressible outflow of energy for a determined end has not permeated the common consciousness. Now the discharge of energy is the most continuously pleasureable of human sensations. Impressions, however delightful, in time lose their force, but expression in the free outpouring of energy is an unceasing joy. Our concept of work is so confused by the shame attached to it in its common form of toil, by the pain and exhaustion of drudgery, that we are blind to the joy and glory of work, the means and the proof of human achievement.

nor the foolishness of their parents, nor their immediate economic necessity, could prevail were it not for the love of activity, the passion for creation, the instinct of work which has become a part of the nature of civilized man. The irksomeness of school duties and the ennui of the street are the only alternatives, and hence the children are willing—alas not ready!—to go to work. The reason why parents cannot keep their children in school, but can keep them at work is because the children themselves want to do something. Irene Ashby Macfadyen, in speaking of the number of children in cotton mills in Alabama, has said: “. . . to these must be added the children who come in to help elder brothers and sisters, who are not counted or paid as workers, although they often do a full day's work for the fun of it.” “The fun of it”—the pity of it! This is an extreme example, but none the less a real example of the irrepressible activity of the child which takes advantage even of the cotton mill to express itself. With a stupid school curriculum that gives little opportunity for doing things, with idleness on the street for the other hours of the day, it is little wonder that the chance to work—even in degrading and injurious and monotonous employments claims and takes the child away from school.

These facts indicate that there is room and need for an advance beyond legislation prohibitory of child labor and compulsory of education. These measures are sound, progressive and essential. But when we have prevented the child from being ruined in the factory, when we have said that he must go to school, then we are compelled to ask, What shall we do with him in school?

To compel children to go to school, no matter what the failings of the school be, and to give them no occupation for empty hours may prove vastly disastrous. The apparent remoteness of the subjects now taught in our public schools from what seem to be the practical duties of life, influences many parents to put their children to work and evade the law. It is next to useless to show to such parents that the very entrance of children into gainful occupations tends to drag down wages and to drive adults out of work. The average parent thinks not of the general economic situation, but simply asks: “Will my child's work add to our family income?” But when he is convinced that added schooling increases the child's chances of making a better livelihood, he strains every resource to keep him in

school, unless, indeed, the evils of out-of-school idleness are so impressive that he puts him to work to keep him out of mischief.

The alternative then is not overwork on the one hand and futile schooling and idleness on the other; the cure is not to drive the child by law from the factory back to the foul street and the overcrowded school. The question is: Shall we be content with prohibition of child labor or shall we proceed to have organization thereof for educational purposes? Children, we have seen, have for ages worked, have been educated in the truest sense by their work, can work to great advantage to the community and to themselves and, under proper conditions, like to work. The inference does not seem far-fetched that they have a right to work. The problem then faces us, how to keep children happily at work during such part of their time and at such kinds of work as shall build them up physically, intellectually, socially—in a word, educate them.

Since experience shows that the factory as it exists to-day cannot do this, inevitably we turn to the public school as the means of solving the problem. One's recognition of the present value of the public school need not be doubted because he points out that its present function is totally inadequate to the task now before it. Its recognized function to-day is that of securing literacy, and we learn with satisfaction that illiteracy is steadily decreasing throughout the whole country, even in the great manufacturing States, with their vast tides of immigration. It sets itself the task of widely establishing the "conventionalities of intelligence," namely the three R's, and therein its success is apparent. We may gratefully recognize that the common school does much in fitting children for common human intercourse.

But there is a growing demand, often blindly expressed, that it do more than this. There are signs of heresy against the fetich worship which confidently assumes literacy to be a cure for all our ills. There is a growing demand that the object of the public school shall be to prepare the child for "complete living." Whatever else "complete living" may include, it always has included, as I contend, an appreciation of industrial processes. But in our schools, as Superintendent Seaver, of Boston, says, "the traditional balance between learning and labor has been upset and learning has taken the whole time." It is even worse than that. It is one particular

kind of learning that has taken the whole time. There are other "conventionalities of intelligence" except the three R's. Familiarity with economic processes, which have long constituted the substratum of conventional intelligence is relegated into unimportance in our educational systems. This gives firm ground for the criticism that the schools are isolated and apart from life. The reason is that now, as always, life is chiefly industrial, whereas the school attempts to educate apart from industry, or, at best, for a commercial or literary environment. Children are trained to be consumers rather than producers. They do not adequately partake in the community life, especially on its industrial side, and since the school continues its tradition of teaching the three R's as its chief function there is a great hiatus in their lives, namely a lack of rich, personal experience, without which their school training in linguistic expression is largely futile. It expects them to talk and write without sufficient material of experience about which to talk and write. By overspecialization the school defeats its own avowed purpose. The function which the home has been obliged to abandon, namely, the furnishing of valuable industrial life to the child, the school has not assumed. What the school needs is to amplify its utilitarian functions, to think more in terms of the real world of industry.

"Manual training" as ordinarily conducted does not satisfy these conditions. In almost no school does it occupy more than one per cent. of the child's waking hours. It is only by the elasticity of language that it can be dignified as "work," for it is plainly not productive labor. It is too commonly a histrionic participation in certain primitive processes which are factitiously interesting and fictitiously important. At best, constructive handwork takes the child no further than the town or craft stage, and there he is left, so far as systematic education goes, at the threshold of modern industry. After the child leaves school, until he is ready to take up his life occupation, there is a gap. This may be filled by some juvenile industry, but there is little or no education therein, for the benumbing, dwarfing atmosphere of the factory or the sweatshop is more likely to demoralize the child than to fit him for future usefulness. His industrial education is not under the direction of wise teachers. He sees industrial life with no perspective, but is plunged into it when he leaves school under the compulsion of earning a living

by the monotonous repetition of one little act. He is not educated by the school for the industrial system; he is simply fed into its maw. To appreciate industrial processes in any large and meaningful way is then impossible. We boast of our practical education and of the stress we lay on "the essentials," and yet allow nine-tenths of our children to pass out of school without any adequate conceptions of the industries in which they are sure to spend the rest of their lives, to say nothing of their inability to make a living therein.

This, then, in a word, is our problem: how the children of the community shall be saved from the evils of premature and deteriorative labor, from ignorance, from idleness and from the consequent immorality. If the school does not make them intelligently industrious, the factory, the mine, the store, will make them ignorantly so, or the street will keep them idle and worthless.

When we ask how modern productive processes can be so used we are led at once to recognize certain indispensable conditions of such use. There is, of course, a certain minimum age limit. It is not here suggested that Bessemer furnaces and rolling mills be made a part of the kindergarten. But it is suggested that there is a gap between the present school age of most children and the age at which they are able to enter the trades, when they could be educated in those processes in which they are to be engaged.

Another condition is that the hours be not overlong at which the child shall work. This principle is already recognized in the limitation of study hours; the futility of study when attention has flagged is well known. The exhaustion of power when interest is lacking is equally applicable to work.

A third negative condition is that the work should not be unduly monotonous. This is closely connected with the previously named condition. If work is varied its hours may be lengthened. The extreme subdivision of labor so characteristic of modern industry is what constitutes its chief evil. That began in the seventeenth century long before the advent of modern power-driven machinery. Machine production has but accentuated it. If it were eliminated, machine production would be robbed of most of its horrors. In an educational system of work, therefore, which is not conducted for

the profit of an exploiter it is an indispensable condition that there be variety of work.

A more positive demand to be made of industrial education is that there be a preliminary acquaintance with the evolution of the industries in question. With this scheme many schools are already familiar in the study of the primitive and craft stages of production. These are valuable in giving an understanding of the principles involved in the industrial processes taught. When these principles are understood, many modern methods easily lose their mysterious and ugly character.

Education for modern industry involves, it almost goes without saying, an acquaintance with the principles of machines. The inclined plane, the wedge, the lever, the screw, the pulley, the wheel and axle, the cam, have become "conventionalities of intelligence" among us almost as truly as the symbols of language. To master them and the principles of the prime movers and of machines for the transmission and utilization of power would tend to make boys and girls not slaves but masters of modern processes. Now, instead of rejoicing in them they are too often afraid of them.

Last, but not least, of the conditions under which modern industrial process should be made a part of education is that real work should be required. Not merely to study about work nor to play at work, but to engage in positive productive work is a necessary part of preparation for complete living. The acquisition of habits of industriousness involves a certain amount of pressure, not to be determined by momentary whims. We do not hesitate at compulsory education—which at present means little but book learning—why should we hesitate at a degree of compulsory work? This does not mean that there should be no joy in work. Far from it. Work is not drudgery. Drudgery educates no one, whether the drudgery be learning to spell or learning to weave. Nor does it mean that the fullest use should not be made of all those stimuli to work which the experience of the race has found valuable in the past, such as festivals, games, music, *esprit du corps*, and the rest. It does mean that the child should learn the force of the motives that will chiefly actuate him when he goes to work for a living, not indeed the cupidity and fear of starvation which the old economists assumed were the real motives, but the joy of expression and production, the "instinct of workmanship," which have become a

part of our race inheritance in spite of the exploitation of man by man.

If these are the conditions of modern industrial education it is evident that a new duty lies before the public school, and the question at once arises: If the school is to teach industry as well as letters and the other essentials, must there not be an extension of school hours? Certainly, and why not? We have seen that the evils confronting us are child labor and child idleness. If the child is in school, that occupies only one-third of his waking hours, at other times, especially in the city, he is idle or overworked. Let us now suppose the entire success of the campaign against child labor and for compulsory education up to the highest standard proposed. These measures which we may assume as fundamental and necessary steps, taken by themselves simply intensify the situation. What will the school do? What must it do if it is to be loyal to its traditions? Whatever else we include in industrial education, a fundamental requirement to be made of it is that it take its cue from modern industry. Let the value of learning primitive and mediæval processes be granted. But that is not enough. Unless the boy or the girl who goes out of the school to make his living knows how to make modern things in a modern way he is not in any proper sense of the word educated. Child labor is not bad any more than modern industry is bad because of the use of the machine, because of the division of labor. It is the abuse of the machine, its unguarded condition, its excessive speed through unduly prolonged hours—it is the repetition of the same mechanical movement once a second and twelve million times a year, it is the minute subdivision of labor with the consequent confinement and mechanization of the worker, that is bad—bad enough for the adult, worse for the child. It is the utter sacrifice of the worker, and especially the child worker, to the process of machine production and divided labor that calls for condemnation. Can, then, the machine and the accompanying division of labor be utilized as an educational force. To deny that they can is to deny that education has to do with real life, and to affirm that labor and culture are antithetic. We are so impressed with the evils of modern machine production partly through the effectiveness of the anti-child labor campaign, that we are loth to acknowledge that the evils are incidents, not essentials, of such production. But when we once

realize that the machine is a means both of subduing nature and of stimulating the intellect a whole new field of education is open to the pedagog.

The alarming increase of neurotic diseases among school children, the crying need of facilities for play and the social necessity for industrial education—all three facts point in the same direction, namely, that the school must assume the responsibility for a greater share of the child's time. If it educated him through play, through the dance, through systematic exercise, there would be less idle and vicious time upon the street; if it educated him through work, it would increase his industrial efficiency, and through both play and work he might well be spared some of his present study of books, with no loss of knowledge of what they contain. Three hours for study, three hours for play and three hours for work would be an arrangement far in advance of our present system with its worse than waste of child energy.

"It would be a most wholesome arrangement in schools," said Froebel, "to establish actual working hours similar to the existing study hours; and it will surely come to this."